

### Zevedei Barbu: an exercise in intellectual biography

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# **Zevedei Barbu**

## **An Exercise in Intellectual Biography<sup>1</sup>**

**MARIUS STAN**

### *Introduction*

This article focuses on one of the main voices in the totalitarian debates during the first decades of the Cold War. I intend to retrieve the political and intellectual biography of the Romanian-British sociologist Zevedei Barbu (1914-1993). A trained psychologist and philosopher, Barbu participated in the clandestine activities of the Romanian Communist Party, especially within the intellectual circles in Cluj, and after the Vienna Arbitrage, in Sibiu (where the exiled Romanian-language university found its refuge). He was an assistant to the renowned philosopher and poet Lucian Blaga. In 1943, Barbu was arrested and tried for subversive activities. Lucian Blaga and another prominent professor, philosopher D.D. Roșca, appeared as defense witnesses on his behalf.

After the war, Barbu held positions within the Ministry of Nationalities and, in late 1947, was appointed cultural attaché at the Romanian Legation in London. During the same year, 1947, he was a member of the Romanian Delegation at the Peace Conference in Paris. Already disgusted with the totalitarian techniques of the Romanian communists, he applied for political asylum in England, in 1948. Mention should be made of another left-wing Romanian intellectual who decided to live in England, political scientist Ghiță Ionescu. Barbu's defection shocked his colleagues at the Romanian Legation. His defiant gesture preceded similar decisions made by important left-wing intellectuals such as Czesław Miłosz. Mention should be made of two other significant defections that took place in 1948-1949: the former left-wing Social Democrat Mișă Levin's, elected to the Central Committee at the First Congress

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of the Romanian Workers' Party in February 1948<sup>2</sup>, and Mihail Dragomirescu's, a literary historian and former chairman of the Democratic Students' Front in the 1930s, Romania's ambassador to Italy. Of the two, Levin remained in the West, whereas Dragomirescu returned to Romania where he held minor positions within the education system.

Unlike Ghiță Ionescu, Barbu did not pursue an émigré career (Ionescu was active in the democratic exile, served in early 1960s as the director of the Romanian Radio Free Europe Service, then he joined the academic world). Barbu studied sociology in the United Kingdom and defended his doctoral dissertation in 1954 at the University of Glasgow. His book *Democracy and Dictatorship: Their Psychology and Patterns of Life* was a seminal contribution to understanding totalitarian tyrannies. Rather than focusing on institutional factors, he proposed a theory of mental forms and distinguished between democratic and totalitarian patterns of thoughts. He founded the Sociology Department at the University of Sussex where he was a visiting professor starting with 1961. His book received wide attention and was reviewed, among other places, in *Foreign Affairs* by noted historian Henry Roberts, then a professor and director of Columbia's Institute for the Study of Communist Affairs.

My main goal is to grasp and deconstruct the canvas of apostasy related to an humanist Leftist intellectual turned into an important anti-totalitarian thinker. I compare Barbu's vision of modern tyranny as an ideological dictatorship to contributions by Hannah Arendt, Raymond Aron, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Carl J. Friedrich, and Leonard Schapiro. The latter was, arguably, the main voice in Britain who developed the totalitarian model during the early stage of the Cold War. My study highlights the heuristic value of Barbu's conceptual contributions, especially his theory of mental frames<sup>3</sup>. In other words, totalitarianism, like democracy, is not only a set of institutional arrangements, but it involves allegiances, attachments, and loyalties, an emotional and intellectual infrastructure. There is a democratic mind and there is a totalitarian one.

Moreover, my study implies digging into the extended tradition of biographical recuperation of the main disenchanted figures of the twentieth century: Arthur Koestler, Ignazio Silone, Richard Wright, André Gide, Manès Sperber, Leszek Kołakowski, Ágnes Heller, or Ferenc Fehér. Barbu was never a true believer, an adamant Stalinist, did not belong to the communist ideological elite, yet he was an intellectual committed to the socialist ideals of equality. He

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<sup>2</sup> Florica Dobre (ed.), *Membrii CC al PCR. 1945-1989*, Editura Enciclopedică, București, 2004, pp. 362-363.

<sup>3</sup> See Zevedei Barbu, "Democracy and Dictatorship. Democracy as a Frame of Mind", in Carl Cohen (ed.), *Communism, Fascism, and Democracy*, Random House, New York, 1972, pp. 561-567.

distanced himself from the Communist experiment without becoming an anti-Communist voice.

His break with communism did not turn him into a staunch public anti-communist. He was, to use Isaac Deutscher's dichotomy, an heretic rather than a *renegade* (I use this terms descriptively, without any normative connotations)<sup>4</sup>. He embraced and developed the totalitarian paradigm, understanding it as a way to grasp the nature of the system he knew, to a great extent, from the inside. After 1976, Barbu moved to Brazil, taught at Brasilia University, and passed away in 1993. My article examines Barbu's intellectual itinerary as emblematic for the 20<sup>th</sup> century's transnational political and cultural experiences often marked by disruptions, exile, illusions, and disappointments.

This article is an exercise in the archeology of ideas and an attempt to re-introduce in the ongoing debates on totalitarianism the contributions of Zevedei Barbu. He was a man of the Left in a political culture where leftist traditions were quite anemic. Without being a pure Marxist *per se*, he embraced socialist ideals of equality and came close to underground communist circles. He lived under democracy until 1938, Fascism between 1938 and 1944, Communism from 1944 to 1948.

To the best of my knowledge there is no synthesis of Zevedei Barbu's intellectual itinerary from the early days as a Left wing academic in war time and post-war Romania to his successful affirmation as a British, and later Brazilian political science figure. This article discusses both continuities and discontinuities, fragmentations and cleavages in the attempt to identify a coherent intellectual trajectory. We deal here with a transnational biography, one that involves not only theoretical issues but also intense political choices during the Cold War.

Let me emphasis that in dealing with Zevedei Barbu's life and oeuvre one encounters a number of challenges: the precariousness of information regarding his Romanian times; limited access to British publications of the 1950s in which Zevedei Barbu's articles appeared and were discussed; his consistently discreet attitude regarding his political and personal tribulations. Unlike other émigré intellectuals, Zevedei Barbu was not involved in major public debates such as those hosted by the Congress for Cultural Freedom. Again, unlike Czesław Miłosz, also a former Communist diplomat who defected in 1951, Zevedei Barbu did not come out with a literary testimony about himself and his friends such as *The Captive Mind*<sup>5</sup>. This situation notwithstanding, there is enough archival and published evidence to make possible and hopefully credible an approach such as the one below.

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<sup>4</sup> See Isaac Deutscher, *Heretics and Renegades*, Jonathan Cape Ltd, London, 1969.

<sup>5</sup> Czesław Miłosz, *The Captive Mind*, Vintage, New York, 1990.

### *Early Romanian Years*

Zevedei Barbu was born on January 28, 1914 in a Transylvanian village to a peasant family. He had been given a name that could not be Magyarized – Zevedeu – but which had, on the other hand, biblical connotations (Zevedeu/Zebedee, father of John the Evangelist). The village in which he grew up (Reciu, in today's Alba county), comprised of only under a thousand inhabitants, was ethnically divided between Romanians and Transylvanian Saxons. He went to high school in Orăștie, and starting with 1933 attended the Faculty of Philology and Philosophy in Cluj-Napoca. This is precisely where he got himself noticed by the influential professor D.D. Roșca, a major Hegel scholar, one of the few who would later defend him in a trial in which he was sentenced to eight and a half years in prison for communist activity. After graduating in 1938, he was appointed tutor at the Institute for Experimental, Comparative and Applied Psychology, and an assistant professor from 1939. He defended his first PhD thesis in psychology and esthetics (with the title *Contributions to the Psychology of Honesty*) and his doctoral dissertation was published in 1940. He was again subject to a transfer in 1942, in Sibiu, and became an assistant lecturer within the department of philosophy of culture headed by philosopher Lucian Blaga, at the latter's request. His academic interests thus shifted from psychology to philosophy.

Together with Blaga, Barbu would lay the foundation of the *Saeculum* magazine, endowed with an unequivocal profession of faith:

“Our goal is to give this publication an European front displaying the Romanian spirituality in its most valuable aspect. To that effect we attach to it a propagandistic function as every issue will benefit from a summary of the articles translated into German”<sup>6</sup>.

The editorial office coincided with Lucian Blaga's home (Bedeus Street 7, Sibiu), and the “short, rather tense and taciturn but very meticulous in deciphering the insipid administrative tasks man”<sup>7</sup> was editor in chief. *Saeculum* was thus signaled as a new and very promising magazine of culture and philosophy in those days. The innermost purpose of those gathered around *Saeculum* was to give a new direction in the Romanian culture but due to history's turmoil only six issues of the magazine would see the daylight. It was published in a city in which a circle of young Romanian intellectuals, the so-called *Sibiu Circle* (*Cercul de la Sibiu*) championed values opposed to any form of xenophobic ethnocentrism. Some of these authors published in *Saeculum*. To

<sup>6</sup> Ion Bălu, *Viața lui Lucian Blaga*, Libra, București, 1995, p. 293.

<sup>7</sup> See Zevedei Barbu's depiction, *Ibidem*, p. 299.

mention just a few names of that influential circle: Marxist philosopher I.D. Sîrbu, literary critics Nicolae Balotă, Radu Enescu, Ion Negoitescu and Cornel Regman, and poet Ștefan Augustin Doinaș. They all shared a pro-Western, liberal constellation of values and admired the writings of the towering literary critic and political thinker Eugen Lovinescu.

All this changed when, in 1943, Zevedei Barbu was condemned for underground left-wing activism. The trial came as no huge surprise for Lucian Blaga and D.D. Roșca who were both fully aware that he was flirting with the Communist illegal party<sup>8</sup>. Still, according to the same source, Blaga's daughter, it was not so unusual for most high profile intellectuals to nourish leftist affinities during the war: D.D. Roșca himself would keep in plain sight several of Lenin's volumes. During Barbu's trial, Lucian Blaga put himself to trouble in defending his former protégé. Before August 23, 1944, Blaga even called on the influential Veturia Goga (widow of right-wing poet and politician Octavian Goga) to render Barbu a less brutal fate<sup>9</sup>. She was indeed very skillful and influential as she served as German interpreter for Ion Antonescu in his meetings with Adolf Hitler and enjoyed a close friendship with the Romanian dictator's wife, Maria Antonescu. This was the extent to which Blaga risked as he went on the hook for Barbu in trying to alleviate his fatal circumstance. Recalling his plea at the trial, Blaga abridges the entire episode:

“I was making the apology of an intelligence. I eulogized in the superlative the intellectual education of a young man whom I considered more of a Hegelian than a Marxist. I spoke with full enthusiasm about a future I glimpsed for him”<sup>10</sup>.

In fact, Barbu was a Hegelian-Marxist.

Zevedei Barbu was released from prison on August 23, 1944, immediately after the collapse of Ion Antonescu's regime and Romania's exit from the military coalition of Nazi Germany and the turning of Romanian arms against Germany. Without pondering too much on his own fate, Barbu resumed his political activity and entered the local communist party structures in Sibiu. After being released he went back to Sibiu in order to convince Lucian Blaga to get involved in political activities<sup>11</sup>. At that moment, Romanian communists were eagerly looking to expand their influence among the intelligentsia. A fundamentally anti-totalitarian thinker, Blaga refused to be enrolled in the pro-communist associations and fronts.

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<sup>8</sup> Dorli Blaga (Lucian Blaga's daughter), personal interview conducted by the author, Bucharest, March, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>10</sup> Ion Bălu, *Viața lui Lucian Blaga...*cit., p. 303.

<sup>11</sup> Dorli Blaga, *Ibidem*.

Meanwhile, Barbu published articles with political content, and lectured on burning issues of the day. He became secretary general within the Ministry for the Nationalities in Minority, serving directly under Gheorghe Vlădescu-Răcoasa, a communist sociologist who had been involved in the same trial of 1943, not as defendant, but as a witness for the prosecution. In November 1944 Barbu lectured on the anniversary of the Great October Revolution. He also visited Moscow a couple of times, between 1944 and 1946, engaging frantically in political and administrative activities. He attended the Peace Conference in Paris, an opportunity to get acquainted with Communist Party luminaries such as Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, and Ion Gheorghe Maurer. A year later, he was appointed cultural attaché at the Romanian Embassy in London. In 1946 he married Laetiția Bertola, a lady of Franco-Italian origins and sister of the famous Romanian film and theatre actress, Clody Bertola.

### *Leaving Romania, Settling in Britain*

In 1948, Zevedei Barbu suddenly and radically changed his fate, gave up the position in the Romanian Communist administration and applied for political asylum in the United Kingdom. In this way, he turns back to an academic career dramatically interrupted in 1943 through his trial and the early years of the communist regime in Romania. Egon Balas, currently a nonagenarian professor of applied mathematics at Carnegie Mellon in Pittsburgh, recalls his first encounter with Zevedei Barbu prior to his defection:

“I met Zevedei Barbu in the spring of 1948 when I went to London. In March 1948 I arrived at the Legation as a newly appointed secretary of the Legation, and he was Counselor of the Legation when I met him. But our contacts were very limited in time because two months later he defected, he left the Embassy. They were pressuring him to return home for a visit, and he was wise enough, to his luck, to know that if he returns home for a visit it will be a long visit... And so he did not go”<sup>12</sup>.

The very nature of the communist regime was quite clear at that point. Barbu would have been very naive to go back to Bucharest and his defection proved to be inspired. As he was worried about his personal safety he understood instantly that going back would be his last journey. At that time the Romanian authorities could not do anything about Zevedei Barbu's defection. There was no such question but there were messages to the Embassy staff to try to persuade him to resume contact with his homeland.

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<sup>12</sup> Egon Balas, personal interview conducted by the author, Pittsburgh, April 26, 2015.

“We were the first team that went to London when Ana Pauker took over [as Minister of Foreign Affairs]. But the surroundings, the old framework was still the old one. There must have been other defections in other embassies. The Pauker takeover meant that all the diplomats were replaced with communists. Grigore Preoteasa was sent to Washington, George Macovescu to London, with the task of cleaning the place. The form was that of calling them home”,

says Egon Balas<sup>13</sup>. So all Barbu's experiences of that critical year were silhouetted against this background...

In 1949, Zevedei Barbu enrolled as a PhD student at the University of Glasgow. He then successfully defended his dissertation in 1954 with one of the very first theses dealing with the psychological aspects of totalitarianisms in comparative perspective (*The Psychology of Nazism, Communism and Democracy*). What followed were two seminal books, *Democracy and Dictatorship. Their Psychology and Patterns of Life* (Grove Press, New York, 1956), and *Problems of Historical Psychology* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1960), “the interesting, occasionally exasperating, book by Zevedei Barbu”, according to Michael Walzer<sup>14</sup>. The latter volume was dedicated to Lucien Febvre, the father of the Annales School of history. Zevedei Barbu argued that historical psychology studies “the variations of the human mind on a vertical line, or the changes that have occurred in the mental structure of groups of individuals as a result of the development in time of their culture as a whole”<sup>15</sup>. When Lucien Febvre launched the Annales School, he emphasized the necessity for the historian to figure out the interaction between the individual and the collective. But “the theoretical and practical aspects of that project were advanced steadily in the 1960s and 1970s in the work of his disciples Zevedei Barbu and Robert Mandrou, who mined the new field of ‘historical psychology’”<sup>16</sup>.

Barbu returned to his alma mater in Glasgow in 1961 to teach sociology and social psychology, while also being a visiting professor at the University of Sussex where he would lay the foundations of the Department of Sociology. Professor William Outhwaite recalls his student years at Sussex in a gripping volume edited by Alan Sica and Stephen Turner<sup>17</sup>, and sheds some valuable light on Barbu's teaching prowess and intellectual interests:

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Walzer: “Puritanism as a Revolutionary Ideology”, *History and Theory*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1963, Footnote 27, p. 76.

<sup>15</sup> Zevedei Barbu, *Problems of Historical Psychology*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1960, p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> John Corrigan, *Business of the Heart. Religion and Emotion in the Nineteenth Century*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2002, p. 271.

<sup>17</sup> William Outhwaite, “From Switzerland to Sussex”, in Alan Sica, Stephen Turner (eds.), *The Disobedient Generation. Social Theorists in the Sixties*, University of Chicago Press, 2005, pp. 208-209.



“...I had been to a seminar by Zevedei Barbu, another Sussex professor who had impressed me not only by his remarkable taste in clothes but also by the fact that he took the work of Georg Lukács seriously, without the dreary Oxford laments about whether it was value free, falsifiable, and so on. For Barbu, Lukács seemed to be a contemporary (he was indeed close to Lukács's disciple and his fellow Romanian exile, Lucien Goldman). I duly traveled down for an interview with Zev and obtained a place and one of Sussex's generous quota of Social Science Research Council Grants”.

One can surmise that this interest in Georg Lukács was in fact a continuation of Barbu's early Hegelian-Marxist worldview.

Regarding Barbu's years at Sussex, other former students remember him for style and intellectual prowess. In the “Acknowledgements” to one of his books<sup>18</sup>, professor of leisure studies at the University of Brighton, Alan Tomlinson, depicts him in most touching colors:

“In a long overdue double acknowledgment to my teachers, I would like to thank the recently retired Mr. David Clayton, who taught me history at Burnley Grammar School, and Professor Zevedei Barbu, who taught me the kind of sociology I believe in at the Graduate School of Social Sciences at the University of Sussex, from 1972 to 1975. [...] The late Professor Zevedei Barbu (‘Zev’ to all who knew him) was the post-World War II diasporic intellectual par excellence. Interviews for the Economic and Social Research Council (or Social Science Research Council as it was then) studentship were personal affairs, one-to-one sessions in his office, eye-to-eye encounters across the haze of the clouds of his tobacco smoke. Did he take to you? Would this relationship work? Induction with Zev for his master's and research students was discussions of Chekhov plays in his elegant book-filled home on Montpelier Road, Brighton, ice cream, and good wines in the garden. He smoked like Humphrey Bogart (‘don't Zevedei that joint, my friend’), talked like Claude Rains in *Casablanca*, and thought and wrote like an interdisciplinary dream”.

### *Zevedei Barbu as an International Scholar*

The importance of Zevedei Barbu's contribution to the debate on totalitarianism is beyond question. A careful reader may notice his oeuvre quoted as fundamental in major contemporary works and bibliographies. See for instance Bernard Wasserstein's outstanding volume on barbarism and civilization<sup>19</sup> where Barbu's first major book, *Democracy and Dictatorship: Their Psychology and Patterns of Life*, is listed in the bibliography concerning “Great Dictators compared” alongside Ian Kershaw and Moshe Lewin (*Stalinism and Nazism: Dictatorships in Comparison*, Cambridge, 1997) or Alan Bullock (*Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives*, New York, 1991).

<sup>18</sup> Alan Tomlinson, *Sport and Leisure Cultures*, University Of Minnesota Press, 2005, pp. x-xi.

<sup>19</sup> Bernard Wasserstein, *Barbarism and Civilization. A History of Europe in Our Time*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2007, p. 848.

In 1956, in *The British Journal of Sociology*<sup>20</sup>, Zevedei Barbu publishes an article on democracy and dictatorship next to important scholars such as Erich Fromm (“The Sane Society”), Karl Mannheim (“Essays on the Sociology of Culture”) or Talcott Parsons and Robert F. Bales (“Family, Socialization and Interaction Process”). So by the mid 1950s his name was already globally recognized in the scholarly debate concerning the psychosocial approaches of the totalitarian regimes.

Furthermore, one of his best articles on the psychology of the German totalitarian phenomenon was published in an edited volume where important names such as A.J.P. Taylor were included<sup>21</sup>. Barbu held that during early Weimar years, Germans lived in a state of *Meinungschaos* (a crisis of beliefs) which germinated in the “readiness to do something, to do anything”. He asked himself, given the diagnosis, why was “a movement of the right, Hitler's movement... the best answer to it” and not Socialism or Communism?<sup>22</sup>. His answer is based on simple but striking evidence:

“While the Socialists kept on talking vaguely in the name of peace and democracy, while the Communists promised a narrow class policy, the Nazis attacked the Versailles Treaty, promised economic autarky and employment. While the Socialists tied up the destiny of Germany with that of European democracy, and the Communists with that of Soviet Russia, the Nazis stirred up the feeling of pride of a heroic nation which is not only the master of its own destiny, but is called upon to master the world”<sup>23</sup>.

In fact, one might say that Barbu's contributions on the Nazi phenomenon resonated with influential works by German émigré intellectuals such as Hannah Arendt and Sigmund Neumann<sup>24</sup>. This quotation from Barbu is highly illuminating:

“The fact that the rationalistic creeds which presided over the process of democratization of many modern societies have later parted company with a democratic way of life, does not mean that empiricism in itself has been more successful in this respect. The critics of modern rationalism have sometimes come much too quickly to

<sup>20</sup> Zevedei Barbu, “Democracy and Dictatorship”, *The British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 7, no. 2, Jun., 1956.

<sup>21</sup> *Idem*, “The Uniqueness of the German Psyche, 1918-1933”, in John L. Snell (ed.), *The Nazi Revolution. Germany's Guilt of Germany's Fate?*, D.C. Heath and Company, 1959, pp. 85-89.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 86.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>24</sup> See Sigmund Neumann, *Permanent Revolution: Totalitarianism in the Age of International Civil War*, Praeger, New York, 1965 (originally published in 1942). See also Leo Strauss, “German Nihilism (1941)”, in F. Flagg Taylor IV, *The Great Lie: Classic and Recent Appraisals of Ideology and Totalitarianism*, Intercollegiate Studies Institute, Wilmington, Delaware, 2011, pp. 219-240.

the conclusion that the anti-democratic trends visible in many contemporary societies, such as political totalitarianism or the super-rationalization of industrial life, are but the tribute paid by contemporary man to the rationalistic creeds of the eighteenth century. It is obviously true that totalitarianism, planning, over-rationalization, etc., follow the pattern of modern rationalism, but their success is, at least partly, explicable as a reaction from those modern philosophies rooted in the creed that the world has to be taken 'as it is', and that the supreme principle is to go ahead in life with no awareness of any established values which give direction to human action"<sup>25</sup>.

And, in the same vein:

"Without secularization, Western man would have remained in an immature state and unconscious of his ability for self-government. Too much secularization and the total abolition of the divine order of life has aroused in man uncertainty and a morbid creed for dependence. Deprived of the security of belief in a transcendental order, he has linked his destiny, by the ties of absolute faith, with a series of empirical forces. In this lies the origin of modern secular myths which form an important psychological ingredient in contemporary totalitarianism"<sup>26</sup>.

This Weberian emphasis on rationalization, secularization, and atomization places Barbu in the company of such authors as Eric Voegelin. On the other hand, it is significant that, unlike Raymond Aron and Voegelin, Barbu did not approach totalitarian creeds as political religions. For him, totalitarianism is a distorted expression of political modernity, a response to the agonizing uncertainties of human conditions under capitalism. Yet, he did not link the totalitarian eruption in modern politics to just economic crisis and insisted on the axiological origins of the phenomenon. In a way, Barbu's view echoed concepts such as the disintegration of values introduced by one of Arendt's favorite writers, Hermann Broch<sup>27</sup>.

When in 1976 was invited to lecture at the University of Brazil by then rector José Carlos Azevedo, Barbu left Europe forever and embraced the "privilege" of living eventually under four different types of regimes. During his Brazilian years, Zevedei Barbu focused on political philosophy and sociology. He even wrote a remarkable introduction to Alexis de Tocqueville's "The Old Regime and the Revolution" for the university's publishing house. Nevertheless, his European liberalism, forged in the battles with disturbing facts and galvanizing ideas, raised enough suspicion among his Brazilian fellow countrymen, both military and Marxist intelligentsia. "He considered Brazil's military dictatorship a form of totalitarianism, one that he knew so well and

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<sup>25</sup> Zevedei Barbu, *Democracy and Dictatorship. Their Psychology and Patterns of Life*, Grove Press, New York, 1956, p. 54.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 63.

<sup>27</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, Mariner Books, 1970.

naturally abhorred”<sup>28</sup>. At some point, towards the end of his life, he even accused Brazilians of being irresponsible narcissists as he was completely terrified by the new forms of populism surrounding the Brazilian political scene<sup>29</sup>. He felt boycotted by his colleagues at the University of Brazil, retired in 1986 and died of cancer in 1993 in almost penury.

### *Understanding Democracy and Totalitarianism*

The type of society that anticipated Hitler's rise to power can be described in sociopsychological terms as a disengaged one<sup>30</sup>. Zevedei Barbu draws on this observation when he tries to explain the appeal of certain tyrants of the twentieth century. His standpoint is somehow reminiscent of Eric Hoffer's book, published in 1951, on the psychological causes of fanaticism<sup>31</sup>. The traits analyzed by Barbu

“are characteristic of the type of personality developed under conditions of insecurity. Through its authoritarian rule, the Communist Parties maintain those conditions. One calls these traits pathological, for they are more frequently found in paranoid behavior. In fact, in a Communist way of life they are normal forms of adjustment. Their abnormality is apparent only from a democratic point of view”<sup>32</sup>.

Furthermore, he develops an explanation in three steps via what he calls (a) a social frame of mind<sup>33</sup>, (b) a pattern of individuation<sup>34</sup>, and (c) personality<sup>35</sup>. Zevedei Barbu regards democracy and totalitarianism in a

<sup>28</sup> José Osvaldo de Meira Penna, “Zebedeu Barbu e o Brasil”, *Jornal da Tarde*, May, 2004. José Osvaldo de Meira Penna is a Brazilian writer, diplomat, and liberal thinker, co-founder of a Tocquevillean society in 1986, together with other Brazilian liberal intellectuals.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>30</sup> See Zevedei Barbu, *Democracy and Dictatorship...cit.*, p. 123; Herbert Blumer, “Social Disorganization and Individual Disorganization”, *American Journal of Sociology*, XLII, Aug. 1937, pp. 871-77.

<sup>31</sup> Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer: Thoughts On The Nature Of Mass Movements*, Harper & Brothers, New York, 1951.

<sup>32</sup> Zevedei Barbu, *Democracy and Dictatorship...cit.*, pp. 262-263.

<sup>33</sup> I.e., “the reflection in the mind of the people of the historical conditions characteristic of their own group. It consists of certain feelings, beliefs, attitudes and habits of thought” (*Ibidem*, p. 263).

<sup>34</sup> I.e., “the structure formed by the fundamental psychological and cultural traits existing in a community, at a given historical level, favours the formation of a specific type of personality” (*Ibidem*, p. 264).

<sup>35</sup> I.e., “if a pattern of individuation is conceived as in interplay of psycho-cultural factors favouring a specific structuration of the human mind, then a personality is the final articulation of this into the mind of an individual” (*Ibidem*, pp. 264-265).

conjoint manner as ways of life developing “in the culture-pattern of a community as well as in the minds of its individual members”<sup>36</sup>. His vision is signally integralist. As Judith Kegan Gardiner accurately observed, he calls for a “valid discipline” to be called “historical psychology”<sup>37</sup>. Barbu's insights can be also compared to the Frankfurt School's Critical Theory with its emphasis on moral and axiological perplexities as conducive to the breakdown of liberal order and the return of long repressed phobias, delusions, and vindictive fantasies<sup>38</sup>.

It is thus important to stress that for Barbu democracy and totalitarianism are both *ways of life*: “The concept of ‘way of life’ included both a specific social and political structure, and a specific type of behaviour and personality”<sup>39</sup>. The goal of his approach is first and foremost to “establish a series of correspondences between the sociological and psychological aspects of the democratic and totalitarian ways of life”<sup>40</sup>. He advisedly uses an approach reminiscent of the Weberian “ideal types” whilst history remains his main source of facts and inspiration. In other words, what Zevedei Barbu attempts is to find a canon within de vast and often “incoherent material offered by the study of history”.

One should also remember that where Max Weber perceived a tension between “ideal” and “real” triggered by the secular spirit of the Reformation, Eric Voegelin talked about a moral anomie that stemmed from the same radical secularization. Erich Fromm went even further and talked about an enhanced “self-responsibility” of the secularized man that can either be at the origin of democratic or totalitarian behavior (if the latter originates in its opposite, i. e., “the fear of such freedom”<sup>41</sup>). However, there are several key questions that need to be raised when mapping the relationship between politics and religion in the context of National Socialism: did this ideology erase the separation line between the secular domain of politics and religion? Furthermore, did the adherents of National Socialism see it as a secular, or as a religious movement? The answer can never be univocal, but there are authors who are right to consider that the very opponents of this ideology describe it as being religious (see also Eric Voegelin<sup>42</sup>). On the other hand, it is of paramount importance to

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 258.

<sup>37</sup> Judith Kegan Gardiner, “Elizabethan Psychology and Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 38, no. 3, Jul.-Sep., 1977, p. 375.

<sup>38</sup> Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, (Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (ed.)) *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Stanford University Press, 2007.

<sup>39</sup> Zevedei Barbu, *Democracy and Dictatorship...cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>41</sup> Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, Farrar & Rinehart, New York, 1941.

<sup>42</sup> Eric Voegelin, *Modernity Without Restraint: The Political Religions, The New Science of Politics, and Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*, (Manfred Henningsen (ed.)), Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, Volume 5), University of Missouri Press, Columbia, Missouri, 1999.

recognize that National Socialism failed to become the new Christianity of Germany, in spite of having tried to replace it. This ideology is rather a so-called *Ersatzreligion* (an substitute religion) and expressed the fact that the *Weltanschauung* borrowed its form from religion, considering it as a substitute for the latter, as it was both sacred and pragmatic [where the *Weltanschauung* means, in a broader sense, ideology, philosophy, system of ideas]<sup>43</sup>. Zevedei Barbu in his turn, making use of his own conceptual framework, keenly observes that one of the major psychological shifts determined by the “separation between religious and secular life was an increase in man's self-awareness and responsibility”. This is precisely where he comes close to Erich Fromm's hypothesis.

“After the shrinking of the authority of the Church, as a result of the Reformation, Western man, as individual and group, became more and more conscious that he had to create standards of action and values in life for himself.”<sup>44</sup>

Zevedei Barbu was convinced that democracy and totalitarianism could not be explained without studying history, a discipline of paramount importance when merged with other contemporary methods of applied sociology and psychology. In doing so, he discovers labels such as “flexibility”, in the case of democracy, and “rigidity”, in the case of totalitarianism. His “ideal types” are not definitive, but his work in the era was prolegomena to any comparative psychological analysis of the political regimes.

### Conclusion

It was not my purpose here to engage in a thoroughgoing examination/excavation of the endless discussions surrounding the concept of “totalitarianism” but rather to illuminate Zevedei Barbu's originality in approaching this novel political phenomenon. I highlighted the affinities between his predominantly psychological approach to totalitarianism and other perspectives, primarily those of Hannah Arendt and Eric Voegelin. I spelled out the relationship between Barbu's formative Romanian years, his involvement in revolutionary politics, and his break with the Stalinist regime in his native country. Philosophically, Barbu started as a Hegelian-Marxist and remained attached to young Lukács' conceptual breakthroughs. Sociologically, he was a

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<sup>43</sup> Uriel Tal, “Aspects of the Consecration of Politics in the Nazi Era”, in Otto D. Kulka, Paul R. Mendes-Flohr (eds.), *Judaism and Christianity under the Impact of National Socialism*, Jerusalem, 1987, p. 68.

<sup>44</sup> Zevedei Barbu, *Democracy and Dictatorship...cit.*, p. 61.

Weberian. Philosophically, Barbu was a liberal thinker deeply aware of and worried by the totalitarian threats to democratic societies.

As it has emerged from the previous discussion Zevedei Barbu was a pioneering figure in the study of the Twentieth century's most disturbing political dynamics. As the ongoing rediscovery, obviously in an updated form, of the totalitarian paradigm seems to be continuing Zevedei Barbu's contribution might add important new answers and enriching suggestions.